

CHAPTER XVI

CATHERINE'S LITERARY WORK

" Anco **vi** prego che il Libro e ogni acrittura la quale trovaste dl me, voi e frate irtolomeo e frate Tomaso e U Maeatro, ve le rechiare per le manl; e fateae qnello che vedete e sla pl& onore di Dio, con missere Tomaao inaieme: nel quale lo trovava alcuna creazione."—St. Catherine to Fra Raimondo, Letter 373 (102)

AT the end of her life, Catherine took thought for the written ord that she was leaving behind her, still to speak with her voice ter she had passed away. We have seen her, in her last letter, jmmend her works to Fra Raimondo and her other literary xecutors : *il Libro e ogni scrittura la quale frovaste di me*. The terary value of these remains is probably the last thing of which ic Saint, " this blessed virgin and mother of thousands of souls," 3 Barduccio calls her, would have thought; she was not, in any ormal sense of the words, a " woman of letters "; but, neverthe:ss, her spiritual and mystical writings rank among the classics of ic language of her beloved native land, and hold, indeed, a osition of unique importance in the literature of the fourteenth 2ntury.

It was in the brief interval between her leaving Florence and er going to Rome, a few months of comparative peace which she assed at Siena in the late summer and early autumn of 1378, that 'atherine had completed her wonderful book : the *Dialogo*, or '*rattato della Divina Prowidenza*, also known as the *Libro della Jivina Dottrina*.

" When the peace had been announced," writes Fra laimondo, " she returned to her own home, and set herself with resh diligence to the composition of a certain book, which, inspired by the supreme Spirit, she dictated in her vernacular.

>he had besought her secretaries (who were wont to write the 2tters which she despatched in all directions) attentively to observe
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